

# Crug Glas Calvinistic Methodist Chapel



*Crug Glas Chapel Swansea, 1986 (© Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, ref. DI2014\_0194 C.496230)*

*North of the Old Duke Public House in Upper High Street is a mound overlooking the Prince of Wales Road and the Hafod. It is now crowned with the ruined walls of houses, the burnt-out shell of an Anglican mission church, and the foundations of a recently-demolished chapel. In the early eighteenth century this green hillock - Crug-glas - was the resort of drunkards, card sharpers, prize fighters, and all the riff-raff of the fairground for which the area was frequently used. It has entered the legendary lore of Calvinistic Methodism because it was here that the great Howell Harris preached on a number of occasions in the late 1730s and early 1740s and faced some of the most hostile audiences of his preaching career. (F.G. Cowley in ed. Glanmor Williams, 'Swansea: An Illustrated History', 1990)*

As F.G. Cowley points out above, long before Crug Glas Chapel was built, Howell Harris, one of the main leaders of the Welsh Religious Revival, preached on or near its future site. The event is infamous because an attempted shooting of the great preacher miserably failed here, the would-be assassin subsequently perishing in a nearby limekiln, where he had retreated to sleep off his drunken stupor.

Crug Glas Chapel was built two generations later in 1799. The congregation had initially worshipped in rooms in Castle Street until, because of an internal dispute within that congregation, a breakaway group decided to build a permanent chapel. Gomer Morgan Roberts, in his history of the Chapel produced for its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, records:

*The leader of the retreating party was David Thomas, brewer by profession, and former member of the Calvinistic Methodists in Llansamlet. David Thomas started building a new chapel on the piece of land in Greenhill, and decided to present it to the Methodists. He won others to comply, David Francis, John Simons, Peter David, and Samuel Lloyd, the preacher. The chapel was opened in June 1799 by the renowned David Jones of Lan-by. He refers to the opening day in a letter to his wife on June 20, 1799: 'I am to-morrow at eleven to open a fine new chapel at Swansea.*

The chapel was formally presented to the Methodists in 1802. The deed is dated 21 December of that year. It reads, '*David Thomas, Gentleman, presents the Chapel and all the new built Meeting House situate at Greenhill...in the franchise of the town of Swansea.*' The Chapel trustees were Ebenezer Morris, David Rees, Hopkin Bevan, David Francis and John Simon. The property was leased for 999 years at the rate of 1d per year. The deed was signed by David Thomas, Ebenezer Morris, David Rees, Hopkin Bevan, David Francis by mark and John Simon by mark.

Gomer Roberts gives an account of the Reverend John Jones, who preached near the chapel under strange circumstances in 1827:

*There was a fair held in Greenhill, and he decided to hold meetings at Crug Glas on the day of the fair and hired a piece of the field for half a guinea. There was nothing special in the afternoon, but in the evening he preached about William Williams' window which was in the chapel inscribed with the words, 'Give an account of thy supervision'. John Jones started to preach but there was little notice taken. He raised his eyes to the sky. Before long he called a large crowd who had come to the fair in order to entertain them. He started to sing with his fiddle in the mid field, and the people danced before him. The dancing stopped when he stopped playing his fiddle. There was (it is alleged) a crowd of four or five thousand. It was said that there were only two or three hundred at the edge of the field who left without hearing the gospel. There was always a fair at Greenhill but never one like that.*

Roberts also writes of a famous preacher at the Chapel, the Reverend David Howell. He was the third of seven sons of David Howell and Elizabeth Hughes. Reverend Howell was first married to Mary, daughter of one of the deacons at Crug Glas, John Cadwalader. Mary died on 3 February 1838 at the age of 38 years and a memorial was placed to her and the children of their marriage on the wall of the Chapel, while Reverend Howell, his second wife Ann, and their children were later buried in the graveyard.

People once used to come to the Chapel cemetery to see the grave of Anne Bowen, who died 24 October 1853 at the young age of 20. She was, at her death, engaged to the Welsh language poet and clergyman William Thomas (1832–1878) who used the bardic name of 'Islwyn'. Islwyn's two best known poems were both called Yr

*Ystorm ('The Storm')* and were written in response to the sudden death of his fiancée. He also wrote these words for her tombstone:

*Anwylyd, gorphwys! Mae fy nghalon i  
Yn ddrylliau dan y beddfaen gyda thi'.  
Oh! rhwng y ser, dysgleiria tecach byd  
Lle bydd y rhai fu erioed yn un  
Drachefn fyth yn nghyd  
Mewn gloewach fyd!*

After a long history touched on here, the congregation of Crug Glas Chapel gradually began to diminish in the twentieth century, partly due to the decline in numbers of Welsh language speakers in the local community. In June 1986, the Chapel closed its doors for the last time and each member of the congregation was given a hymn book to commemorate the event.

Mr Myrddin Ponsford, a former member of the Crug Glas congregation, recalls, '*Crug Glas was one of three Chapels that amalgamated after diminishing congregations made it sense to join into one chapel. Crug Glas was in Greenhill, Babell was in Fforestfach (opposite where the B&Q store now stands on Carmarthen Road), and Jerusalem was also on Carmarthen Road, near to Fforestfach Cross. Crug Glas and Babell closed and all three congregations met in Jerusalem. Sadly, Jerusalem was not in a very good structural state, so the congregation moved again to Trinity in Sketty Park Road, which still exists today. When Crug Glas was closed and being stripped out, the congregation could take a something. I remember that the organ was taken to Tabernacle in Mumbles, the minister there at the time was Reverend Grenville Fisher.*'

Newsletter no.8, Summer 1989, of Capel (The Welsh Chapels Heritage Society) reads, '*Crug Glas, Swansea (Presbyterian) has now been demolished, but as a result of swift warning arising from a previous meeting of the branch in 1987 the graveyard memorials have been carefully recorded and a report on them will be published.*' From this information it can be established that Crug Glas was demolished sometime between 1987 and 1989. In 1993, the Glamorgan Family History Society published its Crug Glas monumental inscriptions survey, which is presumably the report that was referred to in the Capel newsletter. The survey noted a stone plaque fixed to the Chapel wall which confirmed Roberts' account that Mary, first wife of Rev David Howell, lay interred within the Chapel. According to the plaque, also interred there was Sarah their daughter, who died 11 November 1847 aged 18 years and three infant children (it is not clearly stated if they were the issue of David and Mary Howell):

Row 4 Plot 6 The first is a stone plaque fixed to the Chapel Wall measuring 52" high and 26" wide. The transcription reads " Within this chapel lies interred the remains of Mary, wife of Rev David Howells of this town, who died on February 3rd 1838 aged 38yrs. Also of three children who died infants.....Also Sarah, daughter of the above who died November 11th 1847 (?) aged 18yrs

Row 10 grave 11.....The second reference is a stone headstone and kerbstone, the stone being broken in two and the top part laying upon the grave. I believe this memorial indicates that Rev David remarried. "In memory of Ann, the beloved wife of David Howells.....who departed this life July 22nd 1872 age 62.....also, the Rev David Howells, who departed this life August 4th 1873 age 76yrs. Also John Cadwallader Howells, son of the above.....also Martha widow of John Cadwallader Howells,.....also William Sidney youngest son of the last named"

The site stood derelict for roughly ten years until the land was first registered at the Land Registry on 9 July 1998, following a sale on 3 June 1998 by the Properties Board of the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales (or the Presbyterian Church of

Wales) to Swansea Housing Association Limited. On 19 October 1998, Swansea Housing Association gave two months' notice of intention to remove human remains, tombstones and other memorials commemorating deceased persons in order to develop the site for housing.

Genealogist John Ball, in an article posted on his [website](#) in 1998, wrote:

*An observant member of the Glamorgan "RootsWeb" genealogy mailing list spotted the notice and drew it to the attention of fellow List members. I decided to visit the churchyard for myself. Briefly, the graveyard is in an appalling state of neglect!! There are, I would guess, well over 100 gravestones, many of whose inscriptions are still perfectly legible. The earliest I saw dated from the 1830s, and the latest was from 1920 -- but obviously I did not do a full survey. Some of the gravestones are badly eroded, and others have toppled over or collapsed. The graveyard is on sloping land, and is heavily overgrown. Maintenance of the site would have to be done by hand. Access to the graveyard on foot is good at two points, but two of the boundaries of the graveyard overlook a sheer drop of at least 20 feet, supported by a retaining wall. There is no sign of the chapel which once adjoined the graveyard.*

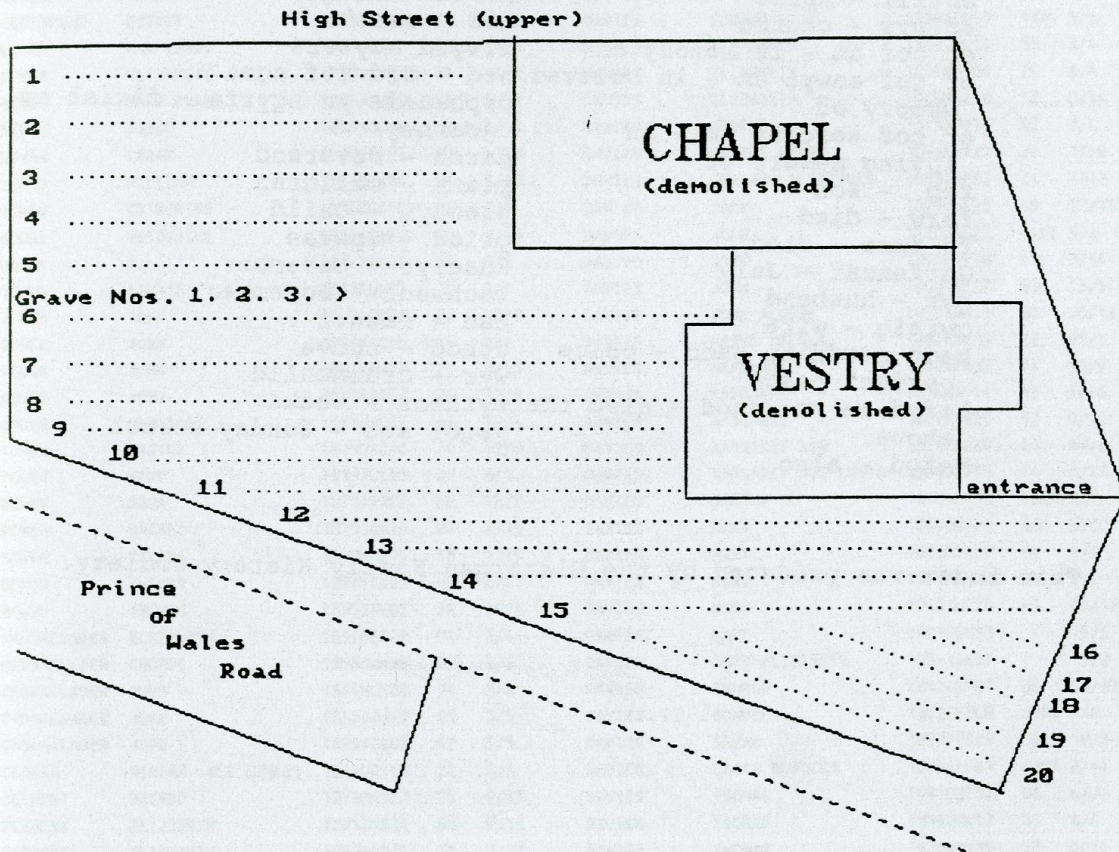
A visit to the Cemeteries and Cremations Section at Swansea Civic Centre has identified that 35 remains were exhumed from Crug Glas Chapel graveyard in November 1999. They were all cremated respectfully at Swansea Crematorium and the ashes placed in separate urns. The first 17 were cremated in November 1999 and the other 18 in early 2000. Steve Griffiths, of Coastal Housing disclosed that during test drilling of the site, the drill hit upon the crypt and human remains were found interred there. Work then had to pause while the Home Office were informed. The Cemeteries Section confirmed that six sets of human remains were cremated on 16 November 1999 and it is possible that these were the remains discovered in the crypt. Furthermore, it is likely that five of the six remains were of Mary Howells, Sarah her daughter and the three infants referred to on the plaque.

John Ball wrote in a follow-up report on his [website](#), 'I re-visited Crug Glas graveyard on 12 May 2004. Part of the burial yard has been destroyed and the remainder is totally enclosed in six-foot-high wooden fencing, preventing access. Some of the gravestones are still in situ, while others have been removed from their original positions and stood upright against the fencing. The whole area is overgrown with dense vegetation. One wonders what will happen if any descendants of the deceased decide to visit the graves of their ancestors!'



CRUG GLAS CHAPEL  
Calvinistic Methodist

This is an index and transcript of the memorial inscriptions of the Crug Glas Chapel burial ground in the High Street area of Swansea. There are 39 pages of transcript preceded by a 4 page index of the names mentioned on the memorials.



The symbol (/) signifies the end of a line on the memorial, while (.) means an illegible character. A small list of commonly used Welsh terms with an approximate translation is included for those who cannot speak Welsh.

*Crug Glas Chapel and graveyard, taken from the Glamorgan Family History Society survey published 1993 (by kind permission of Glamorgan FHS). The plan mistakenly places the Chapel directly alongside High Street, its true location was further back from the High Street than indicated here.*





*Crug Glas graveyard in 2013 (author's picture)*

Swansea Housing Association and Dewi Sant Housing Association joined forces in April 2008 to become Coastal Housing Group Limited and they now own the graveyard, which has been left to rot and decay. It is now impossible to access what is left of it, which is of concern as there are still many graves inside. Recent attempts to ascertain exactly which graves were exhumed and which remain have proved difficult. Surely it is time the graveyard was cleaned up and due respect given to those interred there.

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**Susan McGuire**  
**Volunteer**  
**West Glamorgan Archive Service**  
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